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CHEYENNE WOMAN CUSTOMS

By GEORGE BIRD GRINNELL

The customs here set forth were given me by Cheyenne old women. They were a part of the old wild life of the buffalo days, and many of them have now passed out of use. In describing them, however, I have thought it better to use the present tense.

When a young girl reaches the age of puberty and has her first period, she of course tells her mother, who in turn informs the father. The girl unbraids her hair and bathes. She is then painted red over the whole body by older women. Then, covered with a robe, she sits near the fire, and a coal is drawn from it and put before her, and sweet grass, cedar needles, and white sage are sprinkled on it. The girl bends forward over the smoke and holds her robe about it, so that the smoke is confined and passes about her whole body. Then she and her grandmother leave the home lodge, and go into another small one near by, where she remains for four days.

Such an important family event as this is, of course, not kept secret, and among well-to-do people the father of the girl publicly announces from the lodge door what has happened and gives away a horse.

If there is no medicine, no sacred bundle, and no shield in her father's lodge, the girl may remain there; but if she does so, everything that has a sacred character—even the feathers that a man ties in his head—must be taken out.

At the end of the four days, her grandmother, taking a coal from the fire, and sprinkling on it sweet grass, juniper needles,

and white sage, has the girl stand over the smoke, with feet on either side of the coal, purifying herself. This is always done by young unmarried women.

For four days a woman in this condition must not eat boiled meat. Her meat must be roasted over coals.

Young men will not eat from the dish nor drink from the pot used by her; one who did so would expect to be wounded in his next fight. She may not handle nor even touch a shield or any other war implement, nor may she touch any sacred bundle or object. If the camp moves she may not ride a horse, but is obliged to ride a mare. Women in this condition are careful to avoid entering a lodge where there is a medicine bundle or bag. To do this is supposed to cause an increased flow. Some women have almost bled to death from this cause. For four days women do not go out to walk about much. They spend almost all their time in the lodge.

A married woman during this time does not sleep at home, but goes out and sleeps in one of the menstrual lodges. Men believe that if they lie beside their wives at this time they are likely to be wounded in their next battle.

The owner of a shield is obliged to use special care in relation to menstruating women. He must not go into a lodge where one is, nor even into a lodge where one has been, until a ceremony of purification has been performed. If the woman thoughtlessly visits the lodge of a neighbor, no shield owner may enter it until sweet grass and juniper leaves have been burned in the lodge and the pins have been removed and the lodge covering thrown back, as if the lodge were about to be taken down. Then the covering may be thrown forward again, and pinned together. The lodge is now purified and the shield owner may enter.

After a girl has been married and has gone to her husband's lodge, she may still make use of the protective string for a period of from ten to fifteen days. The husband will respect

the string for that length of time, but usually not longer. The Cheyennes say that this custom had the advantage of enabling the newly married couple to get used to each other, to sleeping together. Men tell me that they used to lie awake almost all night, talking to their newly married wives.

It has long been the custom that a woman should not have a second child until her first is ten years old. When that age is reached, the man is likely to go with his wife and child to some large dance or public gathering, and there, giving away at the same time a good horse to some friend or even to some poor person, to announce publicly that now this child is going to have a little brother or sister. To be able to make such an announcement is a great credit to the parents. The people talk about it and praise the parents' self-control.

When a child is to be born, the woman relations of the father make cradles for it, or some woman not a relation may make one. When the cradle is brought to the lodge and presented, the father may give a horse to each one who brings a cradle. The mother of the girl who is to be confined asks certain women to assist at its birth. They—or even a male doctor called in for the purpose—give the girl medicine from time to time, so that she may have an easy delivery. The medicine given is the root of *Balsamorhiza sagittata*, called by the Cheyennes *hi-tū-nē hiss'-e-wē-yo*, or bark medicine.

When the birth is about to take place, they have a bowl ready in which to wash the child, and a knife is at hand to sever the umbilical cord. In old times they used a flint knife for the purpose, and midwives long preserved these stone knives for this particular use.

When the child is born it is washed. The blood is squeezed out of the umbilical cord, which is wrapped once about the finger and cut off short. The child is wrapped in a sheet or cloth, the inner surfaces of the legs being first dusted with powder from

the prairie puffball, so that the tender skin shall not chafe, and the navel dried with the same dust.

The child is then put in its cradle. At first it is not allowed to nurse from its mother, but some other woman who has a young child nurses it. The medicine women for four days free the mother's breasts from the early mammary secretion. During this time the mother is given doses of *mōt-sī-hī-yūn*, the milk medicine (*Actaea arguta*), to induce a free flow of milk. Four days after birth the child may nurse from its mother.

At any time after the child has become strong, the father may lead out his best horse, and giving it away with other presents (and perhaps even his warbonnet), may have his child's ears pierced—not actually, but formally.